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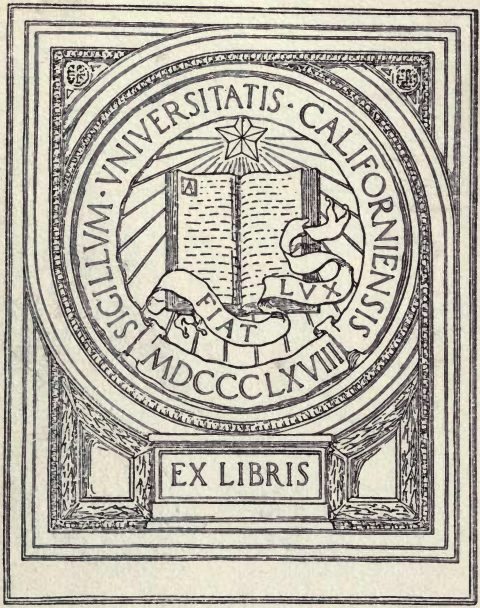
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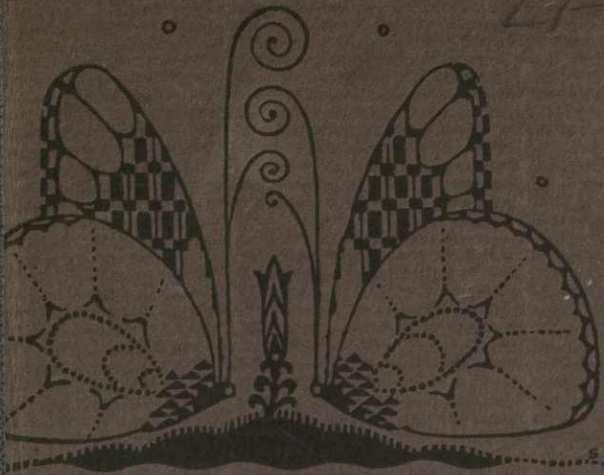

WINTER BUTTERFLIES IN BOLINAS

MARY · D · BARBER ·

Easter
1916

WINTER BUTTERFLIES
IN BOLINAS

May Easter
bring another
year, full of
joy and comfort
with love
from
Nellie.

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Monarch Butterflies and Daffodils in January

WINTER BUTTERFLIES IN BOLINAS

984m

BY
MARY D. BARBER

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THE Monarch Butterfly *Anosia Plexippus* is a familiar object in many parts of

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the United States, but the fact that it migrates, covering in its flights hundreds and even thousands of miles, is not generally known. This butterfly appears in immense swarms every year early in September at Bolinas, a sheltered haven on the coast of California, about ten miles north of the Golden Gate.

A southerly beach walled by high bluffs, a quaint little village which consists of trim cottages set in pretty, old-

fashioned gardens; wide stretches of sunny mesa, broken here and there by arroyos and groves of cypress trees, make up a picturesque landscape; while to the south and westward rolls the vast Pacific, the ceaseless surging of its surf on the smooth sand a never-ending delight to the ear. This is the winter home of the Monarch butterfly which comes not only from the Sierra Nevada mountains but also from the western

ranges of the Rockies.

On the meadows of these mountains a pale green caterpillar, ornamented with glossy black bands, feeds on the leaves of the milkweed plant. This caterpillar forms a chrysalis about an inch long, green spotted with gold. The Monarch butterfly emerges from this chrysalis, unfurls its wings, draws its sustenance from the milkweed blossoms, lays its eggs and lives happily in the high altitudes till the

chill of approaching autumn in the air warns it that the time for migrating has come. Thousands of these frail butterflies start on their long journey toward the Pacific, in search of a mild climate, free from frost and snow, in which they can live all winter.

Fly brown butterflies out to sea,
Frail pale wings for the winds to try;
Small brown wings that we scarce can see
Fly.

Here and there may a chance caught eye
Note, in a score of you, twain or three
Brighter or darker of tinge or dye;
Some fly light as a laugh of glee,
Some fly soft as a long, low sigh;
All to the haven where each would be—
Fly.

In Nevada County great flocks of them have been seen, following the course of a stream downwards from the mountains towards the sea. Before they reach the end of

their journey they scatter, for although they appear in Bolinas suddenly and in large numbers, no flock has ever been seen approaching *en masse*.

The Monarch is of a reddish chestnut-brown, veined with black and bordered with a band of black which is ornamented by two rows of small white spots. The under side of the wings is paler, an ashy buff color similarly veined and bordered. The

butterfly is large, measuring between four and five inches from tip to tip of outstretched wings.

When these butterflies arrive, the air seems full of them, hovering, flitting, whirling like brown autumn leaves caught in a gust of wind. Having reached their winter home they swarm on a cypress tree which affords the best shelter during wind and storm. Each year they come, not only to the same grove,

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but to the very same tree, and always to the southerly and easterly side of it. This tree is within sight and sound of the surf which perhaps reminds the butterflies of the roar of rushing streams and waterfalls in the mountains whence they came. Is it instinct, or scent, or the climatic advantage of some especial tree which guides them in their choice? It is certainly a mystery that a newly arrived flock should choose the iden-

tical tree which was the home of their predecessors the winter before; for they migrate but to end their days, and can not return to show the way to their progeny which will hatch next spring into stupid caterpillars having no desire but to eat till their time for sleep arrives. The instinct or intelligence of the awakened butterfly is inexplicable.

On sunny days the Monarchs feast on the flowers that bloom all winter in the vil-

lage gardens, calla lilies, marguerites and heliotrope being their favorites. One day a bee and a butterfly were vying with each other for the possession of a marguerite. The butterfly alighted on it first, but the bee buzzed his way in under the wings of his rival who, realizing that his companion was dangerous, flew off, leaving the bee sole possessor of the coveted flower.

At evening the Monarchs return to the grove where

they may be seen hanging on the cypress branches. A tree appears brown, as if covered with dead leaves, as the butterflies, in countless thousands hang close together with folded wings to conserve the warmth of their frail bodies. In stormy weather they remain thus dormant for days and even weeks, benumbed by the cold, yet clinging fast to the branches. Many, however, are wrenched from their places of refuge and lie scat-

tered on the ground like a carpet of fallen leaves.

One evening a number of these which had hardly a spark of life remaining in their water-soaked bodies as they lay on the grass, were picked up and brought into the house where a fire of drift-wood blazed bright on the hearth. The butterflies soon revived in the warm atmosphere, hung themselves to the curtains in lieu of trees and went to sleep for the night.

Next morning dawned bright and clear. The captive Monarchs awakened early and flew away, happy, when the window was opened to release them.

The many birds that choose Bolinas as their winter home would have a feast if these butterflies were edible, but Monarchs are protected by an acrid secretion which is distasteful to birds, and enjoy a long life on this account, living not only all winter,

but long enough to taste the sweetness of the spring wild-flowers.

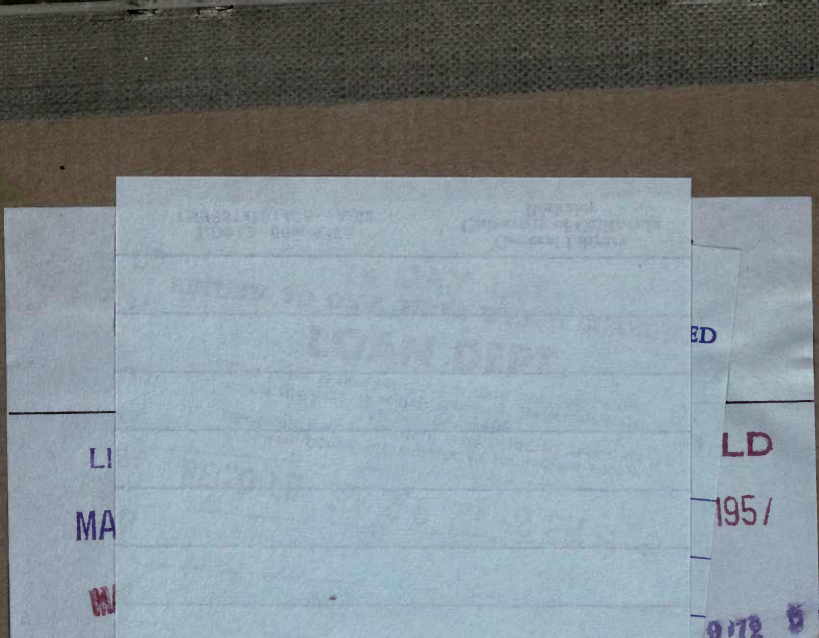
The Monarchs are great migrants. They have crossed the Pacific Ocean, probably on ships, and have reached the Philippine Islands and Australia.

When on a yacht bound for the Farallone Islands members of the party saw one of these butterflies soaring over the ocean about ten miles from shore. It did not rest

on the boat, but with wings spread before the east wind it sped away, following the path of the setting sun like a soul in quest of the ideal. That evening a storm came on suddenly. What was the fate of that lone butterfly?

He died, unlike his mates I ween,
Perhaps not sooner or worse crossed;
And he had felt, thought, known and seen
A larger life and hope, though lost
Far out at sea.

This is the tale of the Winter Butterflies in Bolinas, as told by Mary D. Barber, and put into permanent form by Paul Elder and Company under the direction of Ricardo J. Orozco during the month of January of the year Nineteen Eighteen, with decorations by Rudolph F. Schaeffer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